DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 241 149 PS 014 183

AUTHOR Sjogren, Cliff
TITLE College Admissions Requirements and Student Achievement in High School.
PUB DATE Dec 83
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the meeting of the National Forum on Excellence in Education (Indianapolis, IN, December 6-8, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Admission; *College Curriculum; *College School Cooperation; Educational Quality; *Enrollment Influences; *Enrollment Trends; Higher Education; Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

A review of college admissions standards and practices during the past 25 years illustrates the degree to which higher education has influenced curriculum characteristics at the secondary school level. The cooperative relationships that existed between the two sectors in earlier years gave way to campus pressures in the mid 1960s. College enrollments expanded, and priorities shifted from high school/college articulation matters to student restlessness, impatience, and activism. By the early 1970s, campus activists had gained a strong influence on college curriculum and grading systems. Higher education became more stable in the mid-1970s, while high schools became more flexible by incorporating less demanding curricula. College and high school pendulums were thus out of synchronization. In the late 1970s and today, college academic demands are frequently too severe for the quality of students admitted. At this point, local initiatives guided by flexible models, visible incentives, and standardized displays of results should be encouraged so that students and educators are motivated to exceed rather than conform to minimum standards. (BJD)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED241149

# COLLEGE ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL

National Forum on Excellence in Education
Indianapolis, Indiana--December 1983

Cliff Sjogren, Director of Admissions
The University of Michigan

A review of college admissions standards and practices during the past 25 years illustrates the degree to which higher education has influenced curriculum characteristics at the secondary school level. In 1958, the National Defense Education Act provided impetus for a rapid and significant upgrading of secondary school programs, particularly in mathematics, science, foreign language, and guidance. Such programs as the College Board's Advanced Placement Program, Talent Search, and the National Merit Scholarship Program were enthusiastically embraced by both secondary and college level educators, and those and other similar programs contributed to a comparatively high quality of secondary education throughout the 1960's.

But the cooperative relationships that existed between the two sectors in earlier years gave way to some new campus pressures in the mid 1960's. Each year for several years, the number of 18 year-olds increased between 20% and 30% while the percent of students seeking college admission also increased.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Cliff Sjogren
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 014183

The national response to the rapidly expanding enrollments was to create new institutions and to provide for more students at existing ones. This reckless expansion of the capacity of higher education was occurring even though birth rates were declining precipitously. It seemed that few educators were worried about, or even interested in the future consequences of this expansion!

Because colleges had all of the well-qualified applicants they needed, campus energies and priorities shifted from high school/college articulation matters to some frustrating internal problems, primarily student activism. Also, students were becoming upset with the larger classes and more impersonalization that resulted from the enrollment increases. The students were becoming restless and impatient.

By the early 1970's, campus activists had gained a strong influence on some crucial decision making mechanisms and while some favorable changes resulted, primarily in the diversification of student populations, the college curriculum took a terrible beating. "Relevancy" became the campus buzz word. Mathematics, science, and foreign language courses were perceived as irrelevant by a few influential students on some campuses and were particularly vulnerable to the demands for change. Pass/fail, or, pass/no record grading replaced more traditional forms of student evaluation.

During this period, however, admission standards remained generally high. Not a few freshmen complained that their high school coursework had been more challenging than their college courses. The integrity of the college degree was being questioned.

As higher education entered a somewhat more stable period in the mid 1970's, high schools began adjusting to a "flexible" and less demanding curriculum that had characterized college curriculums during the early years of the decade. At least one high school offered 44 courses for which English credit could be earned. If a student was unable to write he could satisfy his English requirement by electing mass media, bible literature, argumentation, or some other such course. Grade inflation was increasing in high school and students were electing fewer solid courses. And, during this period SAT and ACT scores were dramatically declining.

Certainly this new flexibility was not evident in all schools and at least some students in most schools were well prepared for college. The Advanced Placement Program continued to flourish and the International Baccaluareate was gaining recognition during the 1970's. But an alarming number of students completed high school and entered college with serious academic deficiencies.

Meanwhile, back at the college, there was a beginning of a swing back to higher standards and expectations. As national attention focused on declining test scores, college professors wanted to avoid the stigma of being among those who contributed to the problem of lower education standards. Even though students were enrolling with weaker preparation from high schools, college instructors maintained, or increased their expectations of those students. Further, while college academic expectations were being raised, admission threshholds at many

institutions were lowered. Admissions personnel were under pressure to keep enrollments up. The results were predictable. Many students found themselves insufficiently prepared for rigorous college work. The college and high school pendulums were out of synchronization. In the early 1970's high school graduates were well prepared for a less than challenging college experience while in the late 1970's and today, college academic demands are frequently too severe for the quality of students who are admitted.

I would like to conclude my remarks with a brief editorial. I am bothered by the popular thought that the way to improve the quality of education is to lay down state wide high school graduation requirements. I feel that they will do little if anything to improve the quality of education.

Rather, we should follow the historical pattern that has served this Republic very well and encourage local initiatives that are guided by flexible models, visible incentives, and standardized displays of results so that students and educators are motivated to exceed rather than merely conform to any minimum standard. For example, we might create a standard high school honors formula where students who satisfy certain requirements are given special recognition for their achievements. That formula might include grade point average and HSPR, SAT/ACT scores, completion of a core curriculum, including enriched courses, and a school quality index based on assessment results. Admissions and scholarship priorities could be awarded to those special people who achieve the

honors standard. Further, school boards should include on their agendas at least once each year a discussion of such nationally recognized programs of educational quality as the College Board's Advanced Placement Program and the International Baccalaureate. We have invested heavily in area vocational/technical centers, but how many area academic centers have we created. Also, at least one institution in each state should be freed from state mandated admissions requirements and employ "flexible admissions" to attract the most promising students available.

It is not undemocratic to bring our brightest and best prepared young people together in a rich and rigorous academic environment where their intellectual curiosities can be satisfied.